

Education Position Statement

The Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities supports the position that all students have a right to learn together with students their own age, with and without disabilities, in the same schools, classrooms, and other educational and extracurricular programs. Schools, classrooms, programs, and appropriate transportation must be physically and programmatically accessible to all students. All people with disabilities in Texas should have the opportunity to achieve their potential for independence, productivity, and full integration into the community. Education is a lifelong process vital to attaining a fulfilling, meaningful life. Successful outcomes of an appropriate education for students with disabilities should be evidenced by employment and/or enrollment in postsecondary education classes, as well as meaningful engagement in community life, within one year of leaving high school.

The Council supports the position that serving the individualized needs of each student starts with appropriate identification of all students who have disabilities that require special education services or services provided under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. The numbers of students requiring these services should not be predetermined according to fixed percentages of the general student population, but should be based exclusively on the objective assessment of each student's strengths and needs by qualified professionals. Special education is not a separate educational system, but a service provided to people with specific needs within the general educational system.

Systemic inclusion requires ongoing collaboration and shared responsibility among students, parents, guardians, educators, administrators, and the community at large to ensure all students have the same opportunities to learn, play, be engaged with peers, and fully experience student life. Individualized appropriate instruction and related services that enable the student with disabilities to benefit from education must be provided by highly qualified teachers and service providers who understand their shared responsibility for student success. Successful inclusion requires teacher education programs to prepare all educators and administrators, not only those providing special education services, to work with the full range of students in inclusive settings with access to co-teaching models and ongoing professional development.

Students must be treated with dignity and respect in their social, emotional, and academic education. All students with disabilities must be provided inclusive and integrated academic and vocational instruction, evidence-informed supports, and full access to the general curriculum, extracurricular activities, and related services. The Council supports the use of positive behavioral interventions and supports on a schoolwide basis as an effective way to prevent the use of extreme measures such as restraint and seclusion. The Council opposes the use of any measures that cause physical, emotional, or psychological pain for any reason.

The Council supports the position that schools accepting voucher payments must provide students the same educational rights and opportunities that they would be accorded in the traditional public education system. The Council believes that schools that accept state or federal money to educate students must have uniform admission criteria without respect to disability; abide by federal and state education laws protecting the rights of all students; abide by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act requiring any entity receiving federal funds to include people with disabilities in its program; and accept students at the state rate of payment asking for no additional tuition or fees. The Council opposes publicly funded alternatives to traditional public education that do not meet these criteria. The Council does not support any initiative that would deplete public education funds available for the education of students with disabilities.

The full, meaningful inclusion of Texas students with disabilities should be approached as a fundamental value and underlying principle by which we educate all students. The education of students with disabilities should result in self-determination, lifelong learning, employment, and community engagement.

Approved November 4, 2016